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ATHOL IS ONE OF FOUR COMMUNITIES CHOSEN TO RECEIVE URBAN RIVER VISIONS GRANT

The Town of Athol has been awarded a grant of \$185,171 from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) for implementation of its Urban River Visions project. Athol's grant will be used for construction of a passive environmental park along the Miller's River in downtown Athol.

The park will provide walking trails, picnic tables, rest areas, and access for canoes and kayaks. The site is near to the Town's Environmental Center and Fish Park, which offers ballfields, tennis, basketball, and playgrounds. In addition, two parking sites will be constructed along the river providing access for fishing.

"Urban River Visions fits into our smart growth philosophy, because it takes advantage of infrastructure that already exists in urban and downtown areas," said EOE Secretary Stephen R. Pritchard. "By providing these grants, we're able to help these communities protect their environmental assets and promote smart economic development."

EOEA launched the Urban River Visions Initiative in 2002 by convening a collaborative planning process with the aim of developing a vision and action plan for urban riverfronts in seven cities and towns in Massachusetts. The communities that were chosen achieved a mix of size and geographic locations: Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Fall River, Hudson, Lawrence, and Worcester. Under this initiative, people in each of the municipalities created a unique plan based on their community's needs, including housing, natural resource conservation, recreation, and commercial development. This round of funding is for the implementation of the recommendations from these municipalities' plans.

Among the benefits of this project:

- Creates three new access points to the Miller's River.
- Provides hiking, boating, and nature study opportunities.
- Links with the Town of Orange via the river and the proposed trail system,
- Reconnects the river with the downtown.
- Removes blighted garage.
- Appropriate re-vegetation.

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